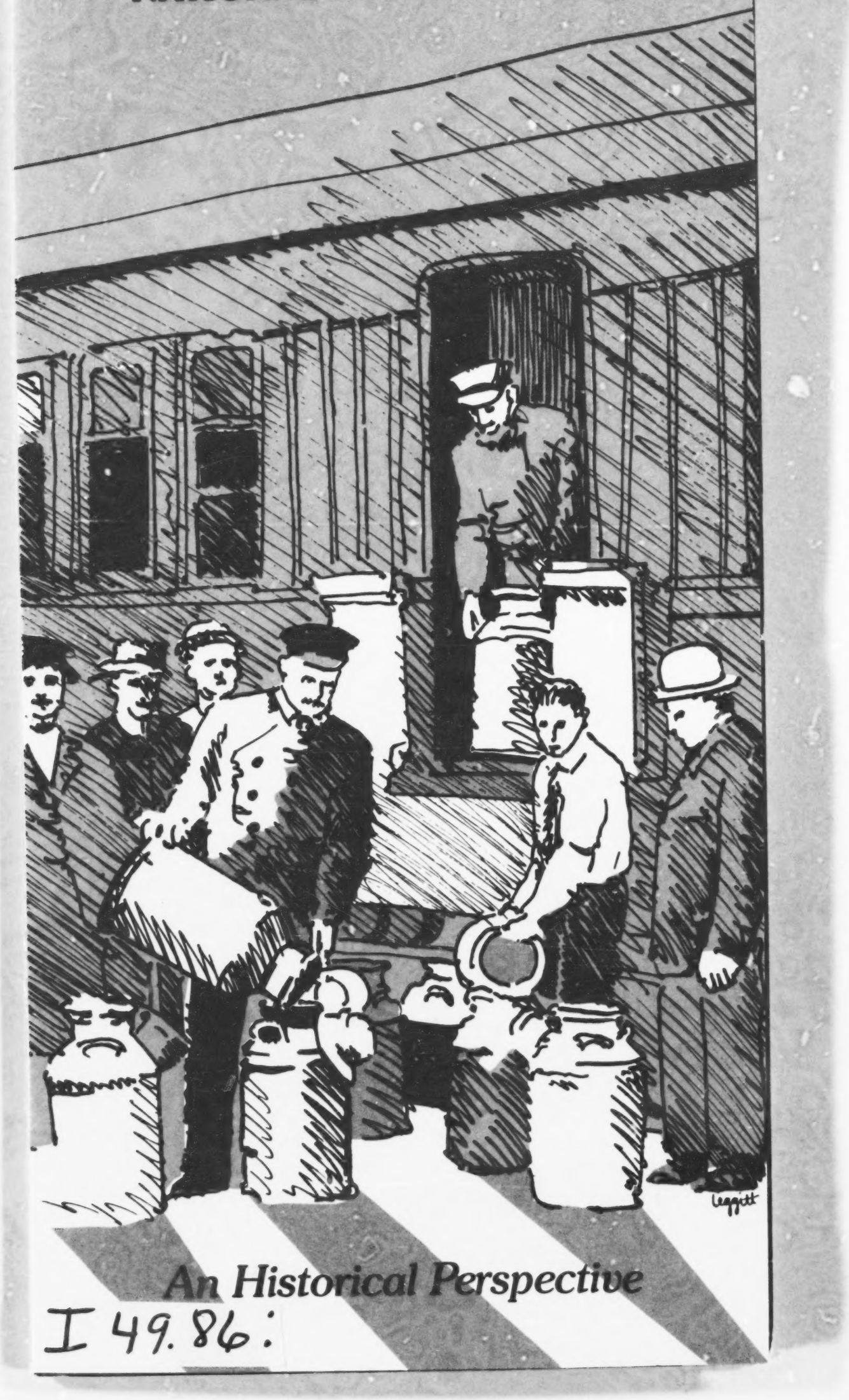
L 46/3

LEADVILLE
NATIONAL FISH HATCHERY



An Historical Perspective

I 49.86:

LEADVILLE
NATIONAL FISH HATCHERY

1 The main building, constructed in 1890. Today, the hatchery is the second oldest in the Federal Hatchery system.

An Historical Perspective...

In 1888, the U.S. Fish Commissioner began looking for a site in the Rocky Mountain Region that would be suitable for propagating game fish and replenishing the dwindling number of fish used as a food source. A site at the foot of 14,000 foot Mt. Massive was chosen for its cold, clean water supply and nearby sources of native Cutthroat trout. It was at this location that the Leadville National Fish Hatchery was built, Congress having appropriated $15,000 for the facility.

The main building, still in use today, was constructed of native red sandstone. It required over 30 stonemasons, and was described, in a news article of the day, as "the most magnificent building in western Colorado." Another article stated, "The hatchery promises to be a great resort for sightseers and those desiring to observe the great insights of "fish farming." In fact, then, as now, encouraging visitors was a high priority. The grounds were planned and maintained with an eye to attracting visitors, and it was noted that they would "always be welcomed and every courtesy shown to them."

This beautiful stone hatchery building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in the 1970's. The view from the front of the hatchery remains as beautiful as it was in 1889 — perhaps more so. Seen off in the distance, the city of Leadville is surrounded, once again, by the growth of pine forests that were depleted for construction and mine timbers during the silver boom of the late 1800's.

The raising of trout at the hatchery began even before the completion of the main building. Eggs collected from trout in several high Colorado lakes were incubated in a temporary building during the fall of 1889. In 1891, the first distribution of fingerling fish was made to lakes and streams in Colorado, South Dakota, and Nebraska. A newspaper article from 1910 reported that "the usual shipment of brook trout was successfully made to Argentina. Rainbow eggs were forwarded to Germany and to the private preserves of his Imperial Majesty, the Mikado of Japan, while spawn of the native trout has been forwarded to France." Native trout were also sent all over the United States from Maine to Washington, including Wyoming, New Mexico, Arizona, and Nevada.

2 Sexually mature or "ripe" fish were netted in order to collect their eggs and sperm.

Transporting fish in the early days was not a simple matter of loading them onto trucks and driving them to a destination. "State-of-the-art" shipments were done via train car. In 1881, "federally-raised fish traveled first class in rail cars designed for their health and comfort — along with their human attendants." By the turn of the century, there was a "fleet" of these specially designed train cars in use throughout the United States. But not all fish traveled via luxury train cars. Many still reached their destinations traveling in milk cans via horse and wagon. The trip was often perilous and fraught with danger. Such was the report from an employee in 1898 — "first (one can) slid off the wagon and a very few (fish) were spilled; then the top flew out when the mule jumped over a log, and we lost possibly a couple of hundred, then the rope came out of the handle and the top flew off again but only a few got out . . ." Time brings progress, however, and today fish are stocked using llamas — much less temperamental than mules. Oh, and helicopters also are frequently used.

3 Once the eggs and sperm were collected, they were mixed at once to fertilize the eggs. Eggs were either hatched at Leadville or transported to other stations for use.

4 Fish food was made by hand out of horse by-products, plus other ingredients.

7 The bottom line . . . stocking waters with gamefish.

Today, 100 years after its beginning, the Leadville National Fish Hatchery continues to fulfill its role in providing trout for sportsmen and women throughout the Rocky Mountain Region. The hatchery still welcomes visitors. As in the early days, they are able to learn about "fish farming," as well as enjoy picnics and hikes on the many trails that meander through the 3,072 acres of hatchery property. During the late fall and winter months, many visitors enjoy snow shoeing and cross-country skiing in the quiet forests above the hatchery.

We welcome you to the Leadville National Fish Hatchery!

U.S. FISH and WILDLIFE SERVICE
Department of the Interior

5 Fish were fed periodically throughout the day.

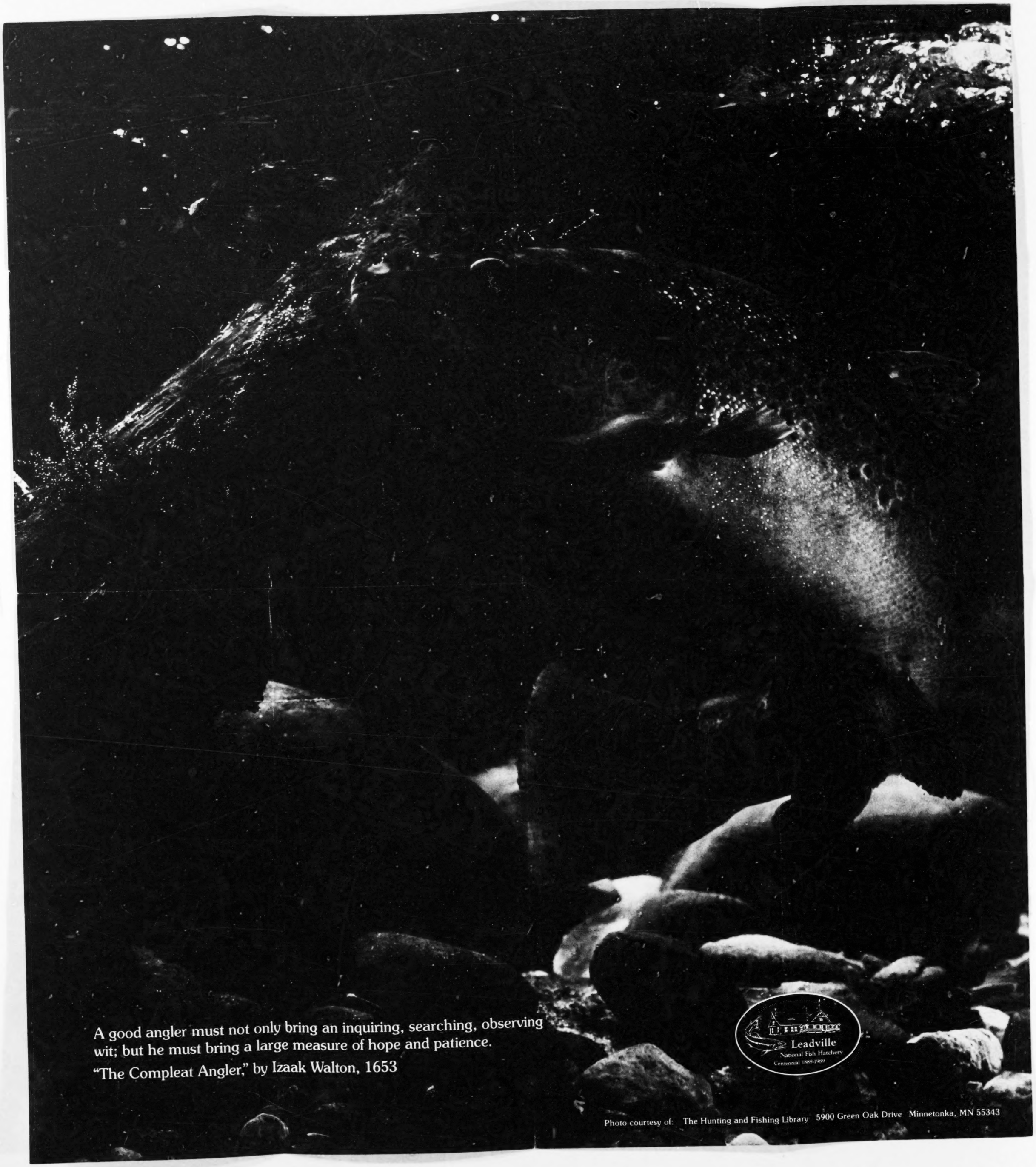
6 Ice was cut from nearby lakes, stored under sawdust in an ice house and used to keep fish feed and employees' iceboxes cool.

L 46/3

LEADVILLE
NATIONAL FISH HATCHERY

An Historical Perspective

I 49.86:



A good angler must not only bring an inquiring, searching, observing wit; but he must bring a large measure of hope and patience.

"The Compleat Angler," by Izaak Walton, 1653

Leadville
National Fish Hatchery
Centennial 1889-1989

Photo courtesy of: The Hunting and Fishing Library 5900 Green Oak Drive Minnetonka, MN 55343